

A King County Guide To  
Ethical Standards

**for**  
**Contractors, Vendors, Clients, and Customers**



King County Board of Ethics

900 Fourth Avenue  
Bank of California Building, Suite 860  
Seattle, WA 98164  
(206) 296-1586 FAX 206-205-0725  
[board.ethics@metrokc.gov](mailto:board.ethics@metrokc.gov)  
[www.metrokc.gov/ethics/](http://www.metrokc.gov/ethics/)

**You are a valued contractor, vendor, client or customer. We believe the contents of this brochure will be helpful to everyone doing business—or seeking to do business—with King County.**

### **Good Ethics Is Good Public Service**

King County believes that public confidence in government is essential. The Code of Ethics is a county law that supports this policy by setting standards to make sure all transactions and decisions are fair and honest. When its provisions are followed, the Code ensures that the personal and financial interests of employees and elected officials do not present a real or apparent conflict of interest in our responsibilities to serve the public.

### **Good Ethics Means Fair Dealings**

This brochure highlights sections of the Code that affect the way we do business with our contractors, vendors, clients, and customers. Because it is important that you know that all business dealings are impartial and fair, employees and elected officials are bound by certain rules in the way we interact with you. There are clear county rules guiding us in what we can and cannot do. Both employees and those who do business with the county will benefit from knowing and following those rules.

### Gifts

Employees may not accept gifts or things of value from those doing business—or seeking to do business—with the county. They may only receive their legal compensation for doing their job. If you want to acknowledge great work performed by a county employee, send a letter or note of commendation to his or her supervisor. Please don't send flowers or candy. The written acknowledgement will be of greater benefit to the employee. If you do give or send a gift, it will be returned or donated.

Examples: A licensing employee cannot accept your gift of a food basket “for a job well done” and must donate it to a food bank.

A county administrator may not accept your gift of a desk clock for orders he has placed with you on behalf of the county. He must return the clock to you.

### Refreshments and Meals

If you are holding a business meeting or conducting official business, county employees may accept light refreshment, such as coffee and a doughnut. However, the county employee must pay for meals.

Example: During a daylong business meeting in your office, you offer county employees a box lunch at noon. Employees may accept the lunch, but must pay for it.

#### Possible Conflict of Interest

County employees may not participate in any county business when they have a personal or financial interest in the matter. These interests would be in conflict with the proper discharge of their official duties or could impair their independent judgment on a county matter. Employees are required to disclose these interests to their supervisors and recuse themselves from working on those matters.

Example: A county manager learns that her spouse's employer is one of the consultants competing for a contract with her agency. She notifies her supervisor immediately and removes herself from working on any part of the transaction.

#### Use of County Facilities and Resources

County property or facilities, such as conference rooms and bulletin boards, may be used if—and on the same basis as—the general public is allowed to use these facilities. They may not be used for personal convenience or profit. County equipment, including computers and vehicles may be used only for official business.

Examples: A subcontractor using a county computer may not send e-mail or download Web sites except in connection with official county business.

A business may not use a county conference room to conduct exercise classes or sell products unless specified by written agreement with the county.

#### Attending Conferences or Seminars

Employees may attend vendor conferences or seminars as long as they are educational programs that benefit the county, are not directed at a specific group of decision-makers, and if fees for attendance are paid by the county. Employees may leave with educational materials, but not promotional items.

Example: A county engineer may attend an educational seminar for which the county has paid the fee; she may take informational handouts, but must leave without hats, mouse pads, calendars, or other items carrying the vendor's logo.

#### Solicitation

County employees may not solicit items from you for personal or county use.

Example: A county employee may not ask a coffee shop for free coffee for an employee meeting or to donate to a county program.

### Testimonials

Employees may not give special treatment in referrals and testimonials.

Examples: A county employee may not give a testimonial in their official capacity as a county employee for use on a vendor's brochure, but may be listed as a reference related to work performed for the county.

An employee may refer a citizen to a private business using a county referral list, but the listing must be free and unrestricted, with distribution open to the public; there may be no financial interest between the employee and the businesses.

### Post Employment Restrictions

Employees who have left county employment may not influence their former departments for compensation for one year.

Example: An agency employee must wait one year before returning to his or her former department to work as an employee of a contractor, as a contractor, or as a subcontractor. This does not affect employees with clerical duties.

### Consultant Disclosure Requirement

If you are a consultant entering into a contract with the county to provide professional or technical services costing over \$2,500, you must file a consultant disclosure form with the executive and ethics office. You must file an amended statement if circumstances change making your responses inaccurate or incomplete. Our Web site has forms available and tells you all you need to know about this requirement under the heading "Disclosure Programs," or call the ethics office for more information

### Advisory Opinions Available

Please visit our Web site to find out more about the King County Board of Ethics and its office. ***Seek advice before you act.*** We are here to help by providing information on the Code of Ethics and advisory opinions issued by the board based on the Code. You'll find opinions under: [www.metrokc.gov/ethics/Advice](http://www.metrokc.gov/ethics/Advice) and Guidance/Advisory Opinions.

## KING COUNTY BOARD OF ETHICS MISSION

To ensure the highest standards of public service by developing, disseminating and promoting readily understandable ethics requirements for King county employees and agencies.

***King County appreciates your business and  
thanks you for helping us maintain high ethical standards!***

For additional information, please contact:

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Alternate Format Available